

...that police detained over 900 people from Beijing's Shouwang Church last year for trying to hold outdoor worship services?

For the past two years, Shouwang members have tried to hold weekly services in Beijing parks only to face repeated detentions, the loss of jobs and residency permits and, in the case of one young woman, sexual abuse during police detention. All ten of Shouwang church's leaders remain in home detention to this day.

Shouwang was the largest of Beijing's Protestant "house churches," so-called because they often begin in people's homes before seeking more permanent gathering space. Protestant 'house churches' in China are illegal because they refuse, for both theological and political reasons, to join the state-approved Three-Self Protestant Movement (TSPM) or the China Christian Council (CCC).

Shouwang Church at its height had over 1,000 members and was meeting in a Beijing restaurant before the landlord terminated its lease after being pressured by authorities. Before resorting to organizing public worship activities, the Church was forced to change its headquarters more than 20 times and was prevented from buying or renting a church building.

The effort to break up the Shouwang Church was not an isolated incident but part of a plan to

reduce the visibility of large, independent Protestant churches and curtail their missionary, educational, and charitable work. In the past year, the NGO ChinaAid published several government directives, including a ten-year plan to “eradicate” churches that refuse to affiliate with the TSPM or the CCC and orders to limit their outreach among university students. During the past year, public security officials in Hebei, Sichuan, Guangdong, and Xinjiang provinces raided independent Protestant churches, briefly detained or beat members of the congregations, and told them to join the TSPM if they wanted to remain open.

Millions of Chinese manifest their beliefs openly and senior government officials have praised the role religious communities can play in promoting “economic and social development” and “socialist principles.” New directives also were issued last year to allow approved religious groups to conduct some charitable activities. These are positive developments that were unthinkable just two decades ago. Nevertheless, as the ongoing efforts to disband the Shouwang Church demonstrate, the Chinese government continues to see the growth of religious communities who resist its oversight as potential threats that need to be “eradicated.”